
The former French Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin goes on trial today on charges of plotting to discredit the then Interior Minister, now President, Nicolas Sarkozy. The hearing is expected to last at least four weeks. Emma Jane Kirby reports:

This **explosive** and incredibly complex trial **has all the elements of a blockbuster political thriller**, a former Prime Minister from **the political elite**, accused of **conducting a smear campaign** against a **rival outsider** to try to spoil his chances of becoming President.

The case dates back five years, when Nicolas Sarkozy's name appeared on a list sent to the former French Prime Minister of top politicians and businessmen who were **wrongly linked** to an illegal bank account in Luxembourg. It was alleged those named on the list had **received bribes from international arms sales**.

When a judge **concluded** the listings were false, the focus of the investigation quickly became **who was behind the spurious allegations**. Magistrates want to know whether that person was Dominique De Villepin. If he's found guilty, the former Prime Minister faces up to five years in prison and a heavy fine. He **denies any wrongdoing**.

Emma Jane Kirby, BBC News, Paris

Vocabulary and definitions

explosive	describes a situation where strong feelings are loudly or violently expressed and there may be unexpected and serious consequences
has all the elements of a blockbuster political thriller	is similar to the plot of a very successful and best-selling novel which has an exciting story, often about crime and politics
the political elite	a group of politicians who hold high power in government
conducting a smear campaign	saying something very unpleasant or damaging about somebody in order to harm their reputation
rival outsider	a person who is competing for the same thing as you but is an unlikely winner and did not belong in the political elite
wrongly linked	said to be connected with something but without any proof or reason
received bribes from international arms sales	taken money from the profits of selling guns and other weapons to other countries
concluded	decided after thinking hard about something and considering all the available information
who was behind the spurious allegations	who was responsible for making the false accusations
denies any wrongdoing	says he has not done anything wrong

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